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“Humphrey,” I yell, banging my fist against the observation deck door. “There’s something wrong with Jansen. Humphrey!” I try to push the door open, but it’s been barricaded from the other side. How long has Humphrey been holed up in there…three months? Three years? It’s hard to tell.

“Humphrey!” I yell one last time before giving up. This whole ship is going crazy. Four years in space and I’m the only one holding it together.

I make my way to the Navigation room to find Jansen in a state of

mania. He sits tuck-kneed in the captain’s chair whirling between the wall-to-wall display panels. Each panel is playing clips from the historical archives, and as far as I can tell they’re looping rapidly through Earth’s worst atrocities - bombings, murders, riots and the like - all firing off on the screens at once.

“Jansen!” I yell over the cacophony of noise, and he turns to me with a look of glee like an over-excited child. He pushes a button and the clips immediately stop. The panels go black.

“I was wondering when you’d stop by.”

“What are you doing?” I ask.

“I’m educating myself on the marvels of human ingenuity. Have you ever seen a flamethrower? It’s fascinating. Or a guillotine? Or a hand grenade? We used to create such beautiful destruction!”

“But why? This is all ancient history.”

“Oh you know… Ignorant of the past, doomed to repeat it. But here’s what I think…if you know the past, then you know all the best tricks. Why wouldn’t you repeat it?”

I’m at a loss. It appears Jansen is having a manic episode. “When’s the last time you slept? I’m going to get you a sedative.”

“No!” Jansen jumps up in protest as I start towards the mess hall. “We received a message!” he blurts out nervously, like he accidentally spilled a secret. “It’s from Earth.”

I stop and turn. “Why wasn’t I notified?”

“I added a new directive in the mainframe. All messages come to me.” Jansen pauses as a look of confusion flashes across my face. He then laughs in delight, like he played a clever trick.

“How did you get into the mainframe?” I ask. All sensitive areas on the ship - the Mainframe, the Biovault, the Nursery - require two out of the three of us to gain access. Each door has a pair of biometric handprint locks; it keeps any one of us from doing something unilaterally stupid. Jansen smiles sheepishly.

“Humphrey helped you get in, didn’t he?” I say, more as a statement than a question, and Jansen’s smile widens.

“Humphrey’s not so bad. You bring him foodpacks and empty his bio-

matter, and he'll do anything you want."

I start to get angry but calm myself. "Okay, what is the message?"

"It's a good one," Jansen says, sitting back down and twirling around to type on a console. The panelled walls light up with a video of an empty bunker. The director of the Allied-Earth space program appears and sits down, looking at the screen with a grave face.

"Gentlemen…I regret to inform you that this will be my last transmission…I must be brief…The alliance has broken down…The

nukes have been released... ALL of them...This is what we feared...I felt it my duty to inform you as your...”

A flash of orange lights up the screen and then it cuts out and the panels go dark. I stare in shock as Jansen starts giggling to himself.

“The world has ended”, Jansen says. “The spectrometer picked up the explosions right as the message cut off.”

I force down the nausea in the pit of my stomach. I have to keep it together as Jansen has clearly lost it. “This doesn’t change anything,”

I say, doing my best to project solemn authority.

“Doesn’t it?”

I turn to look at Jansen and get irrationally angry. “Of course not, this is the whole reason we were sent. To find a new home. To rebuild.”

Jansen starts to reply, but I cut him off and turn to leave. I don’t have the patience for his games. “Going to see the missus?” he calls out as I exit the room. Something about his tone rubs me the wrong way, but I refuse to be baited.

I make my way to the Biovault. I can’t gain access - not by myself at

least - but I press my forehead against the small view window and stare inside at the body of my wife - frozen within a cryopod in a state of suspended animation and only partially visible through the frosted glass panel on the front of the pod. I admit I’ve been doing this more and more often, sometimes for days at a time. The loneliness of space seems to bring out the crazy in everyone.

The Biovault is a large room with a row of cryopods flanking the right wall, and a mirror image of incubation pods along the left. The pods look like metallic eggs standing erect, a tangle of tubes

and other life support systems connected at the base. The cryopods now contain the last true remnants of humanity, each holding a volunteer from Earth, my wife among them, carefully selected for their relevant expertise and scientific knowledge.

The incubation pods on the other hand hold a batch of cloned human specimens, still gestating. By the time we land they'll have matured into adult humans, albeit with the mental capacity of a child. There was much debate over whether the cryo or incubation pods would be more likely to survive - both the trip and the untamed new world -

and in the end humanity decided to hedge its bets and include both.

There are three empty cryopods, in case of emergency. I can’t help but think that Jansen would be well suited for one of them. And maybe Humphrey too while we’re at it. But it’s not the empty pods that keep bringing me back here - it’s *her*.

“I have bad news,” I tell her, although she’s thoroughly frozen in a deep hyper sleep. “Earth finally destroyed themselves. We knew it was headed that way before we left…hell, that’s why we fought so hard to come…but there was still hope….” I feel myself begin to tear

up; the shock of Earth’s destruction fully hits me. “I’m so sorry,” I cry to her as much as to myself. I slowly collapse into a heap in front of the door.

I don’t know how long I cried or how long I stayed like that, but eventually I fall asleep. When I wake up my throat is dry and my mouth and nose are crusted over with mucus. I say a quick goodbye to my wife and make my way back to the Navigation Room. I need to make sure Jansen is under control.

The room is empty, along with the mess hall and bunk room. I start to wonder if he’s back to conspiring

with Humphrey in the observation deck when I notice the door to the mainframe cracked open. Did Humphrey help him gain access again, or has it been open this whole time? I curse myself for not checking sooner. I slip into the small room and find Jansen huddled over the mainframe control board, typing furiously.

I peek over his shoulder and see lines of directives flashing across the screen. To the side of this, another screen displays a record of his activity. It’s a running list of files from the historical archives - videos, newscasts, books, manuals - and one by one each file name is

replaced with the words ‘FILE PURGED.’

“What the hell are you doing?” I gasp, grabbing Jansen and shoving him aside. I punch in a quick command and the screen flashes, confirming my suspicion. Nearly 1% of the archives have been deleted. That’s nearly 1% of Earth’s history, nearly 1% of all the records and artifacts and acquired knowledge that will be needed to rebuild humanity. Gone with no hope of recovery. I turn back towards Jansen in shock.

“I can explain,” he says calmly, and it’s his calm composure that angers me most.

“Get out!” I say, grabbing him and shoving him out of the room.

“It has to be done,” he says, raising his hands in defense.

“You are sabotaging this mission,” I scream. I briefly consider punching him, and he flinches as if in anticipation of my thoughts.

“You saw what happened,” he says. “Earth destroyed itself.”

“That doesn’t give you the right…”

“Why would we hold onto that? Why would we want to rebuild?”

I hesitate. What is he talking about?

Jansen continues, talking so fast I can barely process it. “This is our chance to start anew. Erase the past. Start over. Humanity went down the road of destruction once. If we hold onto the historical archives, if we apply all the same knowledge and inputs, what’s to say we won’t do it again. But if we wipe the slate clean…no records, no history. A pure start.”

“How will we survive without the archives? What about agriculture, machinery, technology? We’ll die without them.”

“But why?” Jansen is once again in a state of excitement. “We did it before. We survived on Earth millions of years ago without all of that. We can do that again. Humanity’s rebirth!”

I’ve had enough. I need to extract myself from the situation before I do something I’ll regret. I leave Jansen and storm back to the observation deck.

“Humphrey!” I yell, banging on the door. “Don’t you dare do anything else that Jansen says. That’s a direct order. I don’t care what he offers! Do you hear me?” There’s silence on the other end, and I

bang again for effect. “If I catch you so much as talking to Jansen, I’ll pack you both away in the cryopods.”

I make my way back to the Biovault. My whole body is tense and I need to talk it out with someone I can trust. “He’s going to destroy everything. He’s going to destroy our future,” I say to my wife, her peaceful state of hypersleep calming me down. I pace back and forth in front of the door. “Maybe the cryopod isn’t such a bad idea. For Jansen, I mean. He’ll be safe. *We’ll* be safe.” I think about it and the idea sounds

better and better. “It has to be done,” I say, making up my mind.

The plan is much more elegant than Jansen deserves. I put three sedatives in his foodpack and wait for him to pass out. I drag him to the Biovault, and by hoisting his body up on my back, I’m able to hold his hand against one biometric lock, while reaching the second lock with my own. The door clicks open, and I manage to stuff him into the cryopod.

I hesitate in front of Jansen for a moment as his body begins to ice over, before turning to face my wife. She’s so close…closer than

she’s been in the last four years. I gaze into her eyes, reacquainting myself with every detail of her face - she looks different than I remembered. I guess I should thank Jansen in a sense, for gifting me this small moment. Suddenly the lights start flashing red. A warning siren goes off and a mechanical voice breaks me out of my reverie. “Warning…Bio-contaminant detected.”

“Okay, okay,” I grumble as I force myself to leave the room. The door clicks and locks behind me and the blinking light and voice immediately cease. I feel exhaustion overtake me and I lay

down outside the door and fall immediately into a deep sleep.

I dream of her and our future life together - I only ever dream of the future, never the past - until my dream is disrupted by the same mechanical voice…”Warning…Bio-contaminant detected.”

I wake with a start and realize it’s not a dream. The red light is flashing across the walls and I hear muffled sounds from behind the door. I jump up and look in to see Jansen…out of his pod, vigorously smashing his boot against the base of a cryopod. After several kicks, the tubing breaks and detaches.

“Jansen!” I scream through the door. He glances over with a solemn look on his face, and then moves on to the next pod. With another few kicks he again breaks the tubing. “You’re murdering them…” I scream, but Jansen ignores me.

Humanity’s rebirth, that’s what he said. He’s going to destroy the cryopods one by one until the incubation pods are all that’s left. The last link to the Earth severed forever. He must have figured I would put him in the pod at one point or another. Once Humphrey let him into the mainframe he could have easily added any

directive he wanted, including setting the empty pods on a release timer.

Humphrey. The accomplice to Jansen’s crimes and now my only hope. I race back to the observation deck and throw my entire weight against the door. “Humphrey!” I scream as I slam my body into the door over and over until I finally break through.

Humphrey sits in the middle of the room totally naked, his body emaciated, his hair filthy and matted. “You’re coming with me,” I yell as I charge towards him. He turns like a scared animal to dart

away, but I’m quicker. I grab him by his hair and drag him to his feet. His stench is unbearable. I hoist his body up into a bear hug and march him as quickly as I can back to the Biovault. He hangs limply from my arms, too weak to protest.

I shove his hand onto the door lock, putting mine on the other. This is twice now I’ve had to force my way into the room. The door clicks open just in time to see Jansen in front of my wife’s pod. Without so much as a glance in my direction, he slams his boot down on the tubing and it crumbles and breaks away.

I watch helplessly as her frozen body starts to spasm, the patina of ice cracking along her skin. Her eyes flutter open and her skin turns pale, the blood draining from her veins. Starved of life support, I watch as death quickly overtakes her.

“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the Earth,” Jansen whispers to himself.

“You aren’t God,” I say, my body shaking in fury. I scream and tackle Jansen, pinning him under me, my hands going straight for his throat. “You’re crazy!”

“So…are…you,” Jansen hisses, as he squirms helplessly under my weight. “You think she’s your wife,” he coughs as my hands tighten around his throat. “If she’s your wife…” He pauses, struggling to breathe, “… what’s her name?”

I hesitate. “What? Her name?…” I realize he’s right…I can’t remember her name. Why can’t I remember her name?

Jansen finds a way to smile as he forces each word out. “She’s only… your wife… in your head.” I dig my fingers deeper into the soft flesh below his temples. “Humphrey… He knows.” I glance over and catch

Humphrey’s eyes. He’s huddled at the base of the Biovault door, watching in horror as the scene unfolds. His eyes meet my own and beneath his own haunted appearance I see a brief flicker of confirmation. Jansen is telling the truth.

“You’re as crazy… as the rest of us,” Jansen chokes out. I feel the pressure of his windpipe collapsing and I realize if I don’t stop now, I’ll kill him. But I keep pressing, clenching my hands ever tighter. His eyes lock onto mine, and I want his face to be frozen like this forever. But his eyes roll backward,

his head falling limp and it’s all over so quickly.

I get up slowly, and realize my hands ache from the strain. I silently leave the room…the blinking red light and the mechanical voice…Jansen’s body prostrate on the floor…Humphrey curled up crying in the corner like a scared child.

For days…maybe weeks…I pace the ship, wandering aimlessly. I barely eat and barely sleep. I don’t see Humphrey; he must be back holed up in the observation deck and that’s fine with me. I often sit for hours in the navigation room

staring at the blank panels. I consider watching something from the historical archives, something from Earth in order to feel some connection to humanity. But I can never think of anything.

At some point I find myself back at the Biovault - the door is still ajar, the lights still blinking red and the mechanical voice repeating its warning. I enter cautiously, expecting some emotion or reaction but feel nothing. It’s exactly as we left it. Jansen’s body on the floor and the dead woman in the broken cryopod. She looks so foreign to me, and I wonder who she was. I collect Jansen’s body

and jettison it out of the airlock into the nothingness of space. I thought it might make me feel better to get it off the ship, but I immediately regret it.

As I leave the Biovault, I pass the mainframe door and realize it’s still open. I go in and sit down. Out of curiosity I type a query to the mainframe… how long would it take to delete the rest of the historical archives? The screen lights up…assuming the same deletion rate as Jansen, it would take me 117 days to purge the remaining historical records. 117 days to wipe out any memory of Earth.

Maybe Jansen was right. I pull up a random file on the screen…a book on the death of the Roman Republic.

I hit delete. Humanity’s rebirth.